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Caleb Fleming.
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# THREE
# LETTERS
## CONCERNING
# SYSTEMATIC TASTE,

EXEMPLIFIED, IN

The CENTAUR not Fabulous:

*LAICUS*'s Letter of *June* 7th, 1755.
*London* Evening-Poſt.

AND

The Biſhop of *LONDON*'s Second Volume of DISCOURSES.

Calc. Fleming

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FAITH! MYSTERY! CHURCH!
Where Myſtery begins, Religion ends.
FOSTER.

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*LONDON:*

Printed and Sold, by C. HENDERSON, under the *Royal Exchange*, 1755.

Price One Shilling.

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To ******* Esq;

*SIR,*

*THE plot of the* Centaur not fabulous, *is laid to remove infidel prejudice and reconcile to the revelation. But where the poetic genius disdains the confinements of reason, and scruples not to leap the bounds of nature, there will be copious matter of criticism.*

*Little more needs be said of* Laicus, *than that of his having caught the college infection, or his being educated in the art of railing at the* unity *of God, and reviling the* unitarian. *None with him can be found in the faith, who do not swallow absurdity, in deference to priestly authority; and are content to subscribe those* creeds, *which men have constituted the standards of orthodoxy. He who cannot subscribe the 14th Article of* Pope Pius's *creed, is no good churchman,* viz. "*I do admit the holy scriptures in the same sense that holy mother Church doth, whose business it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of them.*"

*Both these writers speak of the* Socinian, *in terms of disagreeable distance. And because St.* JOHN *has given us descriptions of the divine mission of Jesus, delivered in the prophetic Style, in figures*

*figures taken from* heaven, aſcending, deſcending, *or* coming down *from heaven, uſed to ſignify, authority, dignity, power, and the changes of condition; they have concluded theſe tropes had a literal ſenſe: and accordingly, will inſiſt on the* pre-exiſtence *of Chriſt, as an eſſential of the chriſtian's faith. Tho' the ſacred Books of the old teſtament, would have otherwiſe taught them; which uſe the phraſe, of* aſcending into heaven, *to denote, "a divine acquaintance with heavenly things, or a more perfect knowledge of the* truths *of God."*

*But it is of the nature of* ſyſtematic taſte, *to interpret arbitrarily, and to determine confidently. which renders this conſideration infinitely ſolacing, viz. that the God of our ſpirits has not left the fate of any man, at the capricious mercy of a fallible mortal, or to the deſtination of any number of them.*

*The* third Letter *was occaſioned by ſome confuſions, which ſhade the* ſecond Volume *of the preſent* Biſhop of LONDON's diſcourſes. *That celebrated pen, has ſuch ſtrokes of inconſiſtency and contradiction, as preſent us with the malignant effects of* ſyſtematic taſte.

*Doubtleſs, the prelatical eye may pour contempt, and the clerical ſneer may proceed to damn an endeavour to expoſe myſtery and prieſtcraft. This matters not, ſince we have full evidence, that their labours to cloſe the human eye, and prejudice the conceptions*

*conceptions of mankind, cannot reflect much honour upon them. And whatever may be the temporal advantage, the scenes of more perfect day can never approve such labours.*

*True it is they row with the tide, and have the rapid stream in their favour; but neither reason, nor religion, nor truth can promise them a final reward; because no man is religious, but by the use of his own understanding, and in the application of his own abilities to discern, canvas, and judge of evidence.*

*The* systematic taste *is vicious; whether of this, or that, or the other complexion: since it wou'd determine character, by opinion or faith; rather than faith or opinion, by character. The healthy, natural* divine taste, *estimates the soundness of a man's creed, by the regularity of his life. And determines him the genuine christian, whose spirit is benevolent, and whose deportment is just and friendly:* "*And who has no* bias, *but what he receives from truth.*"

*To set men free from the delusions of popular prejudice; to alarm, if possible, the wild mystic, entrenched in the sable coverings of night and darkness; to repel the efforts of* Enthusiasm, Churchism, *and* Rome, *was the design of this publication. And to do one's utmost in this divine service, is, to prepare to quit these scenes with a full share of tranquility; having no reason of bit-*

*ter*

*ter remorſe, throughout life's great and critical review.*

*In ſuch reference, theſe Letters had their exiſtence, and with much veneration they are thus thrown before you. But as they freely cenſure the popular prejudice, they neither aſk, nor expect any quarter from the bigot.*

*I am,*

*Sir*

*Your,* &c.

# LETTER the First,

## ON

# SYSTEMATIC TASTE.

THE Author of *the Centaur not fabulous*, has, undoubtedly a claim to the public eſteem, from his very benevolent *deſign* to laſh the reigning vices of the age: for in his freedoms with the *great*, there is diſcoverable, a zealous endeavour to remove from the vulgar eye, illuſtrious examples of abſurdity and crime. But notwithſtanding the general ſpirit of the piece, there are very obnoxious ſentiments and deſcriptions ſcattered in it; which not only admit, but require ſome animadverſion.

His *Heroic* faith, which the SOCINIAN rejects, he pretends to ſhew the moral effects of; p. 25, 26.—"from faith in theſe myſteries of a *trinity*, &c. man neceſſarily, and more

juſtly adores the incomprehenſible majeſty of God; and more juſtly and perfectly contemplates his own littleneſs, and diſproportion of thought to thoſe truths that are vouchſafed to his faith. hence he heartily renders to God a due honour for his teſtimony; and a due acknowledgment of his profeſſed care of his Church; and a due thankfulneſs for the mercy of his revelation. he renders a due obedience to his proper government, as a Chriſtian, that is, the authority of the Church; and a due aſſiſtance to the public peace, which is never ſafely built but on unity of judgment."

Enough, of all conſcience, to ſhew the moral effects of faith in myſtery. but as certainly too much for a man endowed with *reaſon*, and in any degree conſiſtent with himſelf. for, what or how is myſtery concerned, in our adoration of the incomprehenſible majeſty of God? a trinity of perſons, and the majeſty, the peerleſs majeſty of God, are, in nature and reaſon, irreconcileable. It will not, it does not help the adoration; but greatly forwards the confuſion. how do we center our reverence in unity, when there is no unity, but a plurality? which way do we give God *all* the heart, and ſoul, and mind, and ſtrength, if there are three perſons, *equal* claimants of the homage? and which way does the myſtery conduce to a more juſt and perfect contemplation of our littleneſs, and diſproportion of thought? not more aptly, than any other jargon, abſurdity,

or

or contradiction can tend to humble the ſentiment.

And what can poſſibly be meant, " by rendering God a due acknowledgment of his profeſſed care of his church?" This indeed is immediately explained, by our rendering a due obedience to our proper government, as Chriſtians, that is, to the *Authority of the Church*—Here the ſecret burſts open, and though it is impoſſible the myſtery of the *trinity* ſhould ever have this moral effect, *viz.* to excite in us a due thankfulneſs for the mercy of a *revelation*; yet, the frankneſs, the unreſervedneſs of the Author, lays us under no trifling obligation to him for not keeping us in ſuſpenſe; but ſo ſeaſonably removing the obſcurity of his own ground of reverence for myſtery: ſince we, at once, perceive the vaſt emolument of power and influence ariſing from it, which is, " an implicite obedience to the eccleſiaſtical *Authority*." —and yet, when a Chriſtian renders due obedience to his proper Government, as a Chriſtian, that is, to the authority of the *Church*; I ſhould imagine, this writer more preciſely meaneth, his *pariſh prieſt*. foraſmuch as p. 26: he ſais, " It would be moſt reaſonable in us to believe? unleſs we, who think it right to believe implicitly in thoſe on whom our *fortune* depends, think it wrong to believe implicitly in HIM, on whom depends our *Salvation*."

Some might be inclin'd to underſtand the ſingular pronoun, *him*, of JESUS CHRIST: but I am pretty confident, when the reaſoning is examined, it will not appear to be—his ſenſe. The *church*, the CLERGY is intended, the proper government; for Jeſus Chriſt never once enjoyns, or encourages any to believe implicitly on him. he requires, on the other hand, that men uſe their underſtandings, and exercise diligently their rational faculties, in all the articles of their religious credence. Beſides, he was a *revealer* of truth. " and a myſtery explained, is a myſtery deſtroyed: for what is a myſtery, but a thing not known." p. 27.

There is one page however would ſeem an exception, wherein this writer ſpeaking of the *joy celeſtial*, ariſing from a delightful hope of immortality, ſais,— " by our CHURCH, moſt properly ſtiled the *peace of God*." p. 177. which inclines a reader to conclude, he could have almoſt fancied to intimate, by the *Church*, the new teſtament writings, or the ſacred ſcriptures. —But even then, there is no leſs obſcurity; thick clouds return upon us: for where does the Church, i. e. the *holy Scriptures* require an implicit faith in them? do they not expect every man, who wou'd be made wiſe to ſalvation, ſhould ſearch and examine for himſelf into their ſaving contents? yes, certainly they do.— How is it then, that our Church has ſtiled the celeſtial joys, *the peace of God*?—has any eccleſiaſtical

aſtical community, or conſtitution, the ſole keeping of the ſacred records? or, is there one ſuch encloſure poſſeſſed of the celeſtial *keys*, that open the ſenſe of theſe writings? Or, are the ſcriptures as able to make one man wiſe to ſalvation, as they are another? if the latter be the true ſtating, then *implicite* faith, or obedience to church authority, is quite apocryphal; and ſavours too much of the papal ſpirit: nay, in very fact, is no other than the language of adulterous ROME.—And yet methinks, this muſt be the ſenſe of our Author, who will have it, "that a due aſſiſtance to the public peace, is never ſafely built, but on UNITY of judgment."

For arguments ſake, we will allow him to mean, by the *Church*, the Engliſh Eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment; which requires an expreſs aſſent and conſent to her *thirty nine* articles of faith, as the qualification for her religious ſervants, or rather, conſecrated officers.—But is there *unity* in theſe articles? is there any conſiſtency found among them? or, is there any ſuch thing as *unity*, in the judgment of the men who ſubſcribe them? —Let us, for example, compare the opinions of this poetical, this paſſionate declaimer, and the doctrine of thoſe articles, in one or two particulars.

*Art.* 9. "Original ſin ſtandeth not in the following of *Adam*, but it is the fault or corruption of every man, that *naturally* is engendered of the off-ſpring of *Adam*, whereby man is

is — of his *own nature* inclined to evil——and this infection of *nature* doth remain; yea, in them that are regenerated"———

*Art.* 10. " The condition of man after the fall is ſuch, that he cannot turn and prepare himſelf by his own natural ſtrength and good works to faith and calling on God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleaſant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Chriſt preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

What ſais our author, ſuppoſed to be in *prieſt's orders*, " Reaſon and virtue are the ſole beauty and ſole ſalvation of all. Thro' all her realm creation groans without it. The Deity is all reaſon in his nature, conduct, and commands. The great, invariable, eternal alternative throughout his creation, is, OR REASON, OR RUIN." p. 107.

And again, " highly reverence thy own nature; more profoundly adore the divine. and thus to glad all heaven, aſſert, reſcue, ennoble, and with bliſs eternal crown thy ſelf: for without thee, in the conſtituted order of things, heaven is unable to do it——without thee, thou great being! (pardoned be the word ſo bold) there is impotence in heaven." p. 292.

Neither

Neither are theſe to be deemed haſty ſtarts, or noddings and trippings of the judgment, the meer effects of an abſent or interrupted hour: for p. 324. " a maxim moſt true and uſeful it is, no man ever thought too highly of HIS NATURE, or too meanly of himſelf."

Paſſages full to my purpoſe, which prove to a demonſtration, there is no unity, no agreement between the articles, and the fixed judgment of this ſon of the church. for the article affirms, the *nature* of man corrupt and depraved! this writer affirms, the *nature* of man is ſuch, as demands to be highly reverenced! and that no man has ever thought too highly of *his nature.* ——The article affirms, the imbecility of man, that he has no power to do good, without the grace of God by Chriſt preventing us, that we may have a good will. This writer affirms, that reaſon and virtue are the ſole beauty and ſole ſalvation of all—the great alternative, throughout his creation, is, OR REASON, OR RUIN. Nay, to glad heaven, he exhorts and enjoyns, that we aſſert, reſcue, ennoble, and with bliſs eternal *crown ourſelves:* for without us, in the conſtituted order of things, heaven is *unable* to do it. without us, there is *impotence* in heaven.—

Do not the ſentiments claſh and militate extremely? nay, do they not irreconcileably oppoſe? and where then is the UNITY of judge-

judgment, neceſſary to the public peace?—But alas! altogether as inconſiſtent is this declaimer with himſelf, as he is with the articles of his own church: ſince in the point of myſtery and implicite faith, already noticed, for which he ſo warmly contends, he confronts that noble declaration, "of reaſon and virtue being the ſole beauty and ſole ſalvation of all. The Deity is all reaſon in his nature, conduct and commands." *Myſtery* is thus nothing in all the realm of creation: becauſe, *reaſon*, ſhe groans without. all the while, *myſtery* gives faith all her figure, and determines all her ſignificance.

One thing more has ſullied the face of *the Centaur not fabulous*; I mean, the grave arrogance, the ſolemn preſumption of the pen, that could dare to write the following lines, "None ever fully complied with theſe (the moral precepts,) but was eaſily reconciled to the myſteries of the Goſpel." He does not mean the revealed myſteries of the Goſpel, but what he himſelf has called myſteries. and he brands the *ſocinians* as heretics, who have, in a manner, rejected them all. p. 24. And yet, "*faith* in theſe myſteries, *he'll tell you*, is more acceptable to God, than faith in leſs abſtruſe articles of our religion; becauſe it pays that honour which is due to his teſtimony; and the *more incredible* the matter is which we believe, the more reſpect we ſhew to the RELATOR."—

Could

Could the imagination of man, the moſt accuſtomed to *reſveries* and ravings, ever have given ſo extravagant a repreſentation of religious faith? whatever this Author may be able to ſay, he will never, upon his principle, diſcountenance the infallibility of *Rome*, or, explode the mad whim of *tranſubſtantiation*. It, on the contrary, bids fair, upon his axiom, to do the moſt honour to God; "becauſe the more incredible the matter is which we believe, the more reſpect we ſhew to the relator." Let him, if he can, give us a ſample of his ſkill, or ſagacity, in diſlodging the enemy from this *redoubt*, he has built for him with his own hands. I call it ſo, becauſe it has all its ſtrength or defence in its front.—He may rally all his force, and feed all his fire with what *pabulum* he pleaſes; his attempts will be no better than ſtriking the Oak with the Oſier, or putting his finger at the foot of the mountain, in order to its diſlodgment.

Allow him his notion of religious faith, the plain and ſimple, the infinitely intereſting and important articles of our religion, loſe all their glory; they vail to the mummery of non-ſenſe and abſurdity. Such a *faith* is ſurely more fit for fools and madmen, than for the rational, the ſenſible and ſober parts of God's creation.—for I aſk, what poſſible idea can be fixed to the terms? —"it pays that *honour* which is due to the teſtimony."—what is the honour I pay any being, in giving credit to a teſtimony, becauſe the matter is

incredible, do I not, in doing so, discover the most irrational frentic use of all my powers? or, the extremely perverse application of them! *To believe a matter, because it is not to be believed*; is a very strange and unaccountable way, of doing honour to any testimony.—Such indeed seems to be the case of *transubstantiation*, and some other like sort of mysteries, which contain mathematical contradictions: but who, in his senses, ever could once discover the least *honour* done to God, in such a ridiculous, such a romantic faith?

What is the definition he gives of *faith* "It is a submission of our understandings, an oblation of our *idolized* reason, to God; which he requires so indispensably, that our whole will and affections, tho' seemingly a larger sacrifice, will not, without it, be received at our hands." p. 16.

What now is the apostolic definition of *faith?* "It is the substance of things hoped for; and the evidence of things not seen."—i. e. it converseth with the evidence of invisible things. Thus it is said, "that the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."—How very contradictory these definitions? one, sacrificeth the understanding and reason of man, and absolutely dischargeth them from any religious function or operation: the other, requires their most vigorous activity and constant energy, in conversing with evidence; in directing and animating the volitions and resolutions

ſolutions of the human heart. The one definition would ſuppoſe, an utter ſuppreſſion of all the efforts of reaſon and underſtanding, in order that the will and affections may become an acceptable oblation: the other, would inſiſt on their utmoſt liberty and freedom, in all their enquiries and examinations; in order that the compliance of the will, and the approbations of the heart, may conſtitute a reaſonable, or an acceptable ſervice.—

Dr. *Whichcot* was certainly much nearer the truth, than this *Divine*, when he ſaid, "we have nothing to give to God, but our conſent, our will, or volition." This he thought the only ſacrifice. whilſt this writer imagines, "that the underſtanding and reaſon being ſacrificed, give all the value and virtue to the volitions." I cannot conceive of it, as either the more or the leſs abſurd, than it is to ſuppoſe, that God having given us abilities of diſcerning, examining, and diſtinguiſhing objects, in order to a determination of our judgements, and a choice about them; he will only approve us if we firſt put out our eyes, diſcharge or diſmiſs theſe diſcerning powers of and from all their offices; and then, in the dark, play the fool at blind man's buff, and run our heads againſt a wall, or a poſt.

This ſeems to be a juſt illuſtration of that definition of *faith*, which ſais, "it is a ſubmiſſion of our underſtandings, an oblation of

our idolized reaſon, to God ; which he requires ſo indiſpenſably, that our whole will and affections, tho' ſeemingly a larger ſacrifice, will not, without it, be received at our hands."

A reader will take no offence, at the repetition of ſuch ſingular declarations. for every time one takes a review, they adminiſter freſh occaſion of aſtoniſhment! and carry along with them, marks of a lively GENIUS, in their very fabrication. It is owing to this, that we can, at any time, dwell on that other entertaining romance, which gives us the adventures of DON QUIXOTTE, and his man SANCHO.—

*An oblation of our idolized reaſon to God.*— What can be the idea ? an oblation of idolized reaſon, would ſeemingly be *an idolatrous oblation.* The terms naturally lead to this concluſion. But I am as much puzzled to conceive, in what power and ability of the human mind, *faith* has its inherence or reſidence, whilſt the underſtanding is thus ſubmitted, and the idolized reaſon thus offered ; and whilſt the ſeemingly larger ſacrifice of the whole will and affections, are thus diſtinguiſhed, as having no manner of hand in theſe exerciſes of faith.

Myſtical writers ſurely muſt have myſtical powers and faculties, quite different to thoſe we are favoured withal, who have no higher abilities of perception, than the intelligent and rational ones.

ones. They muſt: ſince we are told, " the ſufficiency of human reaſon is the golden calf which theſe men ſet up to be worſhipped, and in the frenzies of their extravagant devotion to it, they trample on venerable authority". p. 14.

Did this writer but diſtinguiſh, and preſerve any conſiſtency, we might allow him ſome meaning: e. g. when any preſume to exclude all divine information being given to the underſtandings of men; ſuppoſing, " that he who at firſt gave the rational powers, to the human mind, could not reveal himſelf, as well by inſpiration continued or repeated, as he did by the firſt inſpiration :"—ſuch may ſurely be chargeable with the frenzies of an extravagant devotion, as they trample upon a venerable authority. But ſhould he again deſire to be underſtood, to intend, by venerable authority, that of the *Church*, in his ſenſe of the word, there will be unſurmountable difficulty in ſupporting his opinion.

The ſufficiency of human reaſon, for the purpoſes of human virtue and of human happineſs, may not be denied, without infinite hazard and danger; becauſe, in all parts of the habitable globe, it is the only ability in man of uſing thoſe varied means of information, which are the allotment of different climes and countries. For has God left himſelf without witneſs, of his benevolence to any? and to what does his teſtimony appeal, if not to human reaſon?

Neither

Neither the foot-ſteps of Deity, in his works, ways, or word, can be either ſeen or underſtood, as ſuch, but by the exerciſes and operations of human reaſon. what elſe enables man to diſ-diſtinguiſh divine inſpiration, from impoſture? or the genuine lines of divine truth and love, from the aſſumed airs of church authority? what elſe can enable us to diſtinguiſh between the compaſſions of Deity, and the contrivances of prieſtly care and commiſſeration? e. g. would one be able to do other, than to look grave at the abſolution of MANDRIN, the late famous french *Robber*, if reaſon, human reaſon did not lend her aid; and enable one to rally the deluſion?—To the bar of human reaſon, the divine Jeſus made his appeal, when he ſaid, *ye believe in God, believe alſo in me.—believe me for the very works ſake. If I do not the works of my father, believe me not. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had ſin.*—Evident appeals are made to human reaſon; and the faith of men, in his miſſion, expected only from the fulneſs of the evidence, *He that has ears to hear, let him hear.* not he who has reſigned his underſtanding, and made an oblation of his reaſon; but he, who has in lively uſe, all his rational powers; he is the man, who is expected to receive the doctrine of this heavenly teacher.—On the contrary, no poſſible *honour* can be done to God, by the ſcheme of faith, that riſes in myſtery, and ſets in obſcurity. *He is light, and the father of lights.*—The darkneſs of night, is, for the roaming of beaſts

of

of prey; not for the aid of human labours: rather, for the ceſſation of them.

*Faith* is fanciful, as it is poetical. fitted to perform the moſt wonderful exploits, only in Egyptian, palpable darkneſs. affrighted at the ſcattered rays of light! with the *mole*, inſtantly burrows again; and returns to the impenetrable paths of deep concealment. And yet, in truth, and fact, *Faith* is a non-entity without evidence. *faith* in any report, that reproaches reaſon, is not, cannot ſuſtain any degree of religion. I know not of one being it could poſſibly ſuit, unleſs a CENTAUR; ſome unnatural, ſome imaginary production: for, "reaſon and virtue are the ſole beauty and ſole ſalvation of all. Thro' all her realm, creation groans without it. and the Deity is all reaſon in his nature, conduct and commands. And becauſe the great, invariable, eternal alternative, throughout his creation, is, *or reaſon, or ruin*!" hence the believing myſtery or things incredible, is an outrage committed, a real inſult on God's nature, conduct and commands. And will dreadfully expoſe the human mind to darkneſs, and the diſmal dreary glooms of deluſion.

This writer would do well to review his addreſs to infidels; he ſhould as POPE ſaid of YOUNG, reverſe his night-thoughts; for theſe are not likely lines to draw the wanderer from his diſtance, and recover him to his duty. much, I fear, of the offence at chriſtianity, is from

from the antic Church-dress; the very quaint features, which squint a thousand ways, here delineated, as the *eye of faith.* And is there not extreme vanity in the *end* to be served by it? namely rendering due obedience to proper government, i. e. *church authority.* will not the *Infidel* ask, and reasonably ask too, the meaning? what has the great and good God put my salvation into the hands of any man, and made it depend on an implicite belief in him? what notion must I have of divine wisdom, what of divine benignity and goodness, in the delegation of such spiritual power in fallible men? surely it is impossible, when reason and virtue are the sole beauty, and the sole salvation of all. and when the Deity is all reason in his nature, conduct, and commands.—Prune then, in the name of truth, prune these exuberances, lop off these excrescences from the *Centaur not fabulous!* and restore to your lucubrations the primitive features of faith and religion. In the zeal of your heart for God, *lie not for him.* In the zeal of your heart for the reformation of the world, lay aside the rooted prejudice that warps your scheme, and spoils all its consistency. In other words, *correct your systematic* TASTE.

Nor let the pious writer imagine, these, the remarks of a carping *Infidel.*—They are made by one who religiously believes *that* JESUS *is the Christ*; and who is solicitous for the rights of private judgment, in all matters of faith and practice. one, who, as cordially as he can do, wisheth

wiſheth the reformation of the age: but cannot deſire it may be attempted by myſtery and nonſenſe. They are made by one that knows, the ſyſtematic pen can never be conſiſtent. that the ſyſtematic pen is rarely or never catholic. —for the man who holds opinions reverſe to the current orthodoxy, muſt be arraigned, and ſentenced as immoral: becauſe not reconciled to myſtery. "None ever fully complied with the moral precepts, but was eaſily reconciled to the myſteries." An amazing aſſociation of ideas! q. d. A man's heart cannot be honeſt, ſincere and holy, unleſs his faith be *heroic*; i. e. unleſs the matter he believes be incredible; and the more incredible the better his faith. poor SOCINIAN! how unhappy thy condition! how fatal thy doom! deſtined to deſtruction, conſigned over to perdition for want of a romantic faith, that would convert a windmil into a Giant; or that can tranſmute mathematical falſehoods into theological truths! But alaſs! thou haſt no humility, for thou doeſt not render due obedience to proper government, the *Authority* of the Church; neither doeſt thou lend aſſiſtance to the public peace; becauſe with thee and the Church, there is no *unity* of judgment. Hence thy want of conformity to the precept, even becauſe of this obſtinate unbending to *myſtery*.——But in ſpite of all thy rationality, *one ſhall be no leſs than three*; *and three ſhall be no more than one*. The credit given to this ſingle article, the matter of which is ſuperlatively incredible, pays the honour due

to *Church teſtimony*; the ſafe and ſhort way to Church-favour, and to Church-ſalvation. But if thou chooſeſt to open thine eyes, and to reaſon on the matter or object of thy faith, thou art ſpiritually proud, and vainly daring! and becauſe not heroical, from that moment thou commenceſt *heretical*; and art in the high road to damnation.

Thou art verily in this tremendous condition, tho' reaſon and virtue are the ſole beauty, and ſole ſalvation of all. and the Deity is all reaſon in his nature, conduct, and commands. Ay; and tho' the great, invariable, eternal alternative, throughout his creation, is, OR REASON OR RUIN.——

How unfathomable the deeps of *churchiſm!* how impenetrable her myſteries! and how much more than ſupremely adorable, her authority! ſhe has the faculty of creating contradictions in conſiſtence. and of conſecrating abſurdity and falſhood. what omnipotence cannot do, ſhe has done: and we have the teſtimony of one of her moſt pathetic ſtriking pens, to conciliate our reverence of her ſupreme ſupremacy, and our credit to her ſuper-almightineſs.——

If, after all, we ſhould make the bold adventure of with-holding the homage ſhe claims of an *heroic* faith; we muſt e'en be content to be damn'd

damn'd by the Church, for the ſake of having ſalvation only from him whoſe nature, conduct, and commands are all reaſon.——

On this rock, *Honoured Sir*, let you and I build our expectations of the felicity, that is final.

I am

Yours &c.

# A Second LETTER, ON SYSTEMATIC TASTE.

*SIR,*

A Letter in the London Evening Poſt, of June 7th 1755. ſigned LAICUS, tho' void of reaſoning, was declamatory. It is not very uncommon for writers, to ſtudy the art of alarming the paſſions. They faſten on theſe, the more effectually to abuſe and miſlead the human underſtanding: eſpecially, ſhould religion, or politics furniſh the theme.——In traffic or commerce, the meaſure would be obnoxious: men would merit univerſal contempt, who ſhould affect to affix names to things, without any ſort of agreement.

And can it be leſs criminal in any, to create prejudices againſt perſons or opinions, by an arbitrary and groundleſs aſſociation? Such as that of claſſing together, *Jews*, *Atheiſts*, *Deiſts and Socinians?* Were we to aſk LAICUS the reaſon of this aſſortment? it would be no great preſumption to conclude him unable to aſſign a more plauſible reaſon, than that, " he had heard or read of theſe different appel-

appellations given to men of different opinions." But after all, he never knew a man of common ſenſe, pretend an affinity between them. For, a *Jew*, is confeſſedly one who owns the exiſtence of a God; and is of opinion, that the Moſaic Diſpenſation does yet remain unaboliſhed. A *Deiſt*, in modern phraſe, is one who believes in the being of a God, but denies any expreſs divine revelation, or a particular providence. An *Atheiſt* holds opinions which deny a God and a providence. A *Socinian* believes in one God, and owns both a divine revelation, and a providence. Thus various and inconſiſtent, are the ſyſtems of theſe ſeveral denominations.

As well might *Laicus* have thought of uniting fire and water, and of eſtabliſhing a communion between light and darkneſs. nevertheleſs, with him, they are alike the enemies of truth; and at much the ſame remove from the chriſtian faith. They are all of them dangerous to the Conſtitution. But if any has the lead, in its formidable tendency, it is that of the *Socinian*. "Religion, however the Church, would be expoſed to certain deſtruction, if once the adminiſtration of a Chriſtian Kingdom ſhould fall into ſuch hands."

*Bigotry* thus amazingly blinds the eye, and manacles the reaſon of man. Had *Laicus* ever uſed his underſtanding, or made any extenſive enquiry into hiſtory, he muſt have known, that in

in CHARLES the II^d's time, [one of his favourite princes,] *William Penn*, the conſtituted Governour of Penſylvania, obtained this firſt article in the *Charter of Privileges*, March 4th, 1680. " That all perſons living in this province, who confeſs and acknowledge the one almighty and eternal God, to be the Creator, Upholder, and Ruler of the world: and that hold themſelves obliged, in conſcience, to live peaceably and juſtly in civil ſociety, ſhall in no ways be moleſted or prejudiced for their religious perſuaſion, or practice in matters of faith or worſhip; nor ſhall they be compelled at any time to frequent or maintain any religious worſhip, place or miniſtry whatever.——And all perſons who alſo profeſs to believe in Jeſus Chriſt, the Saviour of the world, ſhall be capable, (notwithſtanding their other perſuaſions and practices in point of conſcience and religion) to ſerve this Government in any capacity, both legiſlatively and executively, he or they ſolemnly promiſing, when lawfully required, allegiance to the King as ſovereign, *&c.*" —compare laws agreed upon in England, april 25, 1682. or *the Charter of Liberty to the people of Penſylvania*, to the ſame purpoſe; reſpecting the univerſal toleration, and the unreſtrained rights of conſcience.——

If a government of ſuch complexion, could ſuppoſe this plan moſt conducive to the benefit of an infant Colony, and the proper baſis of its growth

growth and advancement to perfection and glory; *Laicus* is as blind as a beetle, if he does not ſee his own abſurdity, in ſuppoſing religion at all expoſed to danger, by the adminiſtration of a Kingdom falling into the hands of a *Socinian:* unleſs he was able to ſhew, that the *Socinian* tenets have more tendency to abridge men of the rights of conſcience, than the *Athanaſian*, or the *Arian*. But if, on the other hand, it ſhould be manifeſt, that of all the diſtinguiſhing opinions, that of the *Unitarians* bids the faireſt for encouraging an univerſal toleration, and an unlimited freedom of mind in all religious profeſſion and practice; then, his apprehenſions are all chimerical, and his panic childiſh and fanatical.

If any *evils* could ariſe, to the juſt and equal meaſures of civil government, from an *univerſal toleration*; there was more reaſon to apprehend it in a COLONY, remote from the center of ſupreme power, and to be peopled from various nations and Kingdoms.——But PENN was ſagacious and diſcerning; he aimed at the ſtandard of reaſon and nature, in the firſt principle of the conſtitution: and he found the advantage, unknown to unreaſonable and intolerant ſtates and communities, where the ſyſtem throws in, beſides negative diſcouragements, other tokens of capricious power; or rather, the weakneſſes of rule and ſovereignty.—

I will

I will endeavour to point out the origin of the *Bigotry*, by the aſſiſtance of *Monſieur Bayle*; who, if I underſtand him aright, has finely rallied the MYSTIC, in the reaſons he has aſſigned for the admiſſion of myſtery in religion. "The ſpeculative myſteries of religion, *ſais he*, are little troubleſome to the people; they will, indeed, tire a profeſſor of Divinity very intent upon them in order to explain them, and anſwer the objections of the Heretics. ſome other ſtudious men who examine them with great curioſity, may be alſo troubled by the reſiſtance of their reaſon; but all other men are at perfect eaſe about it: they believe, or fancy they believe, all that is ſaid of them, and quietly reſt in that perſuaſion. wherefore he would not be far from fanaticiſm, who could imagine that citizens and peaſants, ſoldiers and gentlemen, would be freed from an heavy yoke, if they were diſpenſed from believing the *Trinity*, and the *Hypoſtatical union*. They like much better a doctrine that is myſterious, incomprehenſible, and above reaſon: they are more apt to admire what they do not comprehend; they form to themſelves an idea of it more ſublime, and alſo more comfortable."*

Thus artful are the myſtics. they have the addreſs to manage the weakneſſes, and ſooth the vanities and extravagancies of mankind. The ſcheme

* See his note (H) on Socinus.

ſcheme of policy, ſuits with the great aim of popularity: for the more the glare of theſe conſecrated meteors, their viſionary preternaturals, the more certain the infatuation. ſo that myſtery in religion, is of the very eſſence of *witchcraft*, ſorcery, or incantation; as it bereaves a man of his underſtanding, deludes his ſenſes, and accuſtoms him to thoſe irrational and wild exerciſes of the mind, which will prepare him for the extraordinary ſervices of the *prieſt*, or for thoſe of the *prince*, who would gladly exerciſe a ſovereignty over his faith and his conſcience.

The footſteps of *Bigotry*, in all its ſtrange and aſtoniſhing effects on the human ſoul, may, perhaps, be thus traced with more certainty to its ſource, than any other way. The plauſible pretence, is, "that God, out of his infinite wiſdom has accommodated himſelf to the ſtate of man, by mixing darkneſs with light in his revelations." † But what if CESAR ſaid this, it is not the nearer to truth, for being his opinion.——One much more wiſe and knowing than *Ceſar*, has contradicted the apothegm, by aſſuring us, "that ſo far from being worthy of any revelation from God; no rational man would ſo much as *light a candle in order to put it under a cover, or buſhel.*" But would not this be chargeable on a *revelation*, if darkneſs was deſignedly mixed with its light? or will any ſay, that darkneſs can be deſigned to guide the operati-



† Bayle ibid.

ons of the human mind, or aſſiſt any of its labours? Thoſe who walk by it, will neceſſarily ſtumble. and their condemnation muſt be this, "they choſe it rather than light." Thro' an affected indolence, and a vicious ſtupidity they fancied rather to amuſe themſelves with the imagery of nightly viſions, than with thoſe objects which court the examination of open day.

The myſtic ſyſtem will neceſſarily have a favourable glance from the LADY, who had adopted this maxim, "We eſteem thoſe men moſt, the extent of whoſe ability we know not; for we always preſume the beſt of what we ſee but by half." ‡ A maxim worthy the pen of *Madam de Sablè*, or of any other woman, who is moſt delighted with the *reſveries* of imagination. But, by no means, does it agree with the operations of reaſon, which are ſlow, gradual, cool and ſober. which ſuppreſs the ſallies, and reſtrain the flights of the roving fancy: and which gives rules, too rigid and ſevere for ſuch lively ſpirits, much happier in their wild excurſions, and who only enjoy themſelves in their extatic tranſports!—We, nevertheleſs, juſtly venerate men, as well as do confide in them, from the excellencies we actually diſcern in them; and not becauſe of what we gueſs may poſſibly be their accompliſhments, but are abſolutely hidden from us.—the latter may beſt ſuit the taſte of a fine Lady, whoſe erudition has been in *Novel* and *Romance*; or whoſe

‡ Bayle ibid.

whoſe devotions have been in viſions, raptures, and abſtractions; but the former will ever guide the honours, which are paid by reaſon and judgement.

I am almoſt conſtrained to cite a paragraph, from a brother of his, of *Brazen Noſe*, Oxford;—"Myſteries would undoubtedly never have been revealed, unleſs they were deſigned to be enquired into; but then, as they are myſteries, that ſhould be ſufficient to admoniſh us, ſuch inquiries ſhould always be attended with reverence, and profound humility: wherefore it may and often does happen, where the unlearned is ſatisfied and content with a general account, that his conception of a divinely revealed truth is clearer than that of the more learned, who will not reſt eaſy without diving for conviction into particulars." *

I ſhould imagine, this doughty defender of myſtery, miſtook Bayle; in his intending to make ſuch an application of, and improvement upon him. But how much like *Shakeſpear*'s baſeleſs fabric? how extremely ridiculous the account of myſtery? "which would never have been revealed, unleſs deſigned to be inquired into. And yet, thoſe who are ſatisfied and content with a *general* account; in other words, thoſe who enquire not at all, have clearer conceptions than they who do enquire."—



* *Eccles's* ſixteenth Serm. p. 16. 1755. printed by *Mores*.

this is what he has virtually ſaid, and is nearly the very ſame thing with BAYLE's ſaying, "ſpeculative myſteries of religion are little troubleſome to the people: they will, indeed, tire a *profeſſor of Divinity* very intent upon them, in order to explain them, and anſwer the objections of the Heretics."—

I ſhould ſuppoſe, *Laicus* had his ſentiments from *Bayle*. Yet, what is a myſtery revealed? what is it, but a myſtery opened, explained and done away; all its obſcurity being removed? And if it be, the difficulty of knowing what it means, is no more; and the unlearned may underſtand it full as well as the learned.—No, but ſais the ſame *Oxonian*, "Myſteries were revealed to be enquired into, and embraced, but not to be diſcovered or comprehended, for then they would ceaſe to be ſuch; neither are they the *leſs* important for being obſcure, as our adverſaries would inſinuate, but ſometimes the *more* ſo upon that very account."—*

So inconſiſtent are theſe *trinity* defenders; for before, he gave the preference to the unlearned; becauſe ſatisfied and content with a general account, and as having *clearer* conceptions than the learned enquirer. whereas now it ſhould ſeem, that the more a learned enquirer can puzzle the ſubject, the more obſcure he can make it, ſometimes it will be the *more* important.—No doubt, the very learned *Univerſity*, was extremely honoured and divinely edified, by

* Ibid. p. 17, 18.

by the matchleſs reaſonings and heavenly inſtructions of this preacher!

What, in the name of truth, do theſe *myſtics* aim at? would they again involve us in the darkneſs of Egypt! and ſpread the fable vail of popery once more over us? There is, in the defence and illuſtration of myſtery, ſo much of the effrontery of a preſuming ſpirit; and always ſo much cenſoriouſneſs, with ſo little charity, or benevolence, that one would be inclined to reject the tenet, from the very ſpirit of the advocate. *Socinus* and *Arius*, with all their followers, are appointed their portion in outer darkneſs, by theſe very confident ſons of myſtery.

It is beyond meaſure aſtoniſhing! that perſons who conſult the ſacred teachings of Jeſus and his Apoſtles, ſhould ever once imagine, "that any *truth* can be held in righteouſneſs, which is not held in charity." Chriſtian *faith* and *love* can no more be ſeparated in the moral, than light and the meridian ray of the ſun, can be in the natural world. No criterion of *truth* is ſo convincing as that of *goodneſs*. Love is the end of the commandment. So that to want benevolence, is to fall ſhort of the *grace* of the Goſpel. The Bigot ſhould tremble, whilſt he reads his new teſtament. how heavy, how tremendous the weight of judgment, that hangs over the cenſorious ſpirit! ſince, *with what meaſure he meteth, it ſhall be meaſured to him again!*

Theſe

Theſe ſyſtematics plead very ſpecioufly for *unity* in the faith; but never conceive of the *unity*, as having no other tenure, than *the bond of peace.* So ſurely is the ſyſtematic taſte, a viciated one; that either corrupts the truth, or elſe holds it in unrighteouſneſs: i. e. with bitterneſs, wrath, envy, and malice; with evil-ſpeaking and calumny, and with injurious uſage of perſons and characters. And, without controverſy, that zeal is unhallowed, which is not of the charitable and benevolent complexion towards all men.

The late Dr. *Jeremiah Hunt* has finely and effectually expoſed Bigotry and Prieſtly power, in an aphoriſm or two.—" Of all the rights of men, none are ſo ſacred as thoſe of conſcience. —God is the only moral governour of the univerſe; if we could give up theſe *our* rights, it would be great impiety to diſpoſe of *his*.—All affectation of dominion over the conſciences of men, is abſurd and wicked. all ſubmiſſion to ſuch unrighteous uſurpations, is baſe and ſervile."—See Serm. Vol. IV.

To return from this digreſſion, to the Letter-writer. *Laicus*, as if aware of his inability of reaſoning, would gladly give weight to his notion, by making it the baſis of religion and of the *Church's* ſafety. And in his panic cries out, " *ruin! deſtruction!* if ever the adminiſtration of a Chriſtian Kingdom ſhould fall into the hands of

of *Atheiſts*, *Socinians* or *Jews*." Strange, he ſhould be under apprehenſion from the *Jew!* But alas! there once was a Bill for rendering eaſy their Naturalization.—— *Laicus* is not leſs terrified from the ſcheme of the *candid Diſquiſitors?* which led me to reſemble him to an infamous *Divine*, I once heard CURSE them, in one of our city-pulpits. I mean, the man whom *Orator Henley* did very pertinently repreſent, as having advanced the abſurdity of MUGGLETON, in his *Self-exiſtence of Jeſus.*—a man of this caſt will rail and ramble, abuſe and calumniate, without any remorſe. *Jews* and *Atheiſts*, *Deiſts* and *Socinians*, are, with him, men of the very ſame religious complexion:——and yet, poor wretch! there is no man who uſeth his underſtanding, and has formed any juſt ideas of opinions, and of the nature and reaſon of things, but would prefer even atheiſm itſelf to *his* chriſtianity.—Nor is there the leaſt danger of miſtake, when we affirm, that to ſuch extravagant ſpirits, bloated with vanity, unſufferable vanity, the divine and rational Scheme of the Goſpel, has been made obnoxious to the *ſneer* of the indolent ſuperficial enquirer. But this will be the caſe, whilſt men chooſe to form a judgment of chriſtianity from church-men, from human ſyſtems, or from popular names; rather than from the Goſpels themſelves.——

*Religion*, that of the chriſtian, has nothing at all to do with the fancies, dreams, and whimſies of men, whoſe heads are giddy with myſtery, with notions of ſpiritual domination, and with

with civil emoluments of title, rank, and revenue. Such clergy, would contend as earneſtly for the peculiar notions of *Arminius*, as of *Calvin*; for thoſe of *Socinus* as of *Athanaſius*; if the temporalities did but happen to be annexed to articles of ſuch complexion.—The bounce of *Laicus* on the Liturgy and Articles of our church, is extremely ridiculous, as it would inſinuate, there is no chriſtianity without its pale; tho' the very ſame civil power which has given her epiſcopal conſtitution its exiſtence, equally countenanceth and protects an anti-epiſcopal one beyond the *Tweed*.—

This bigotted churchman is confoundedly afraid of *Socinianiſm*, notwithſtanding. and ſuch are his paroxiſms, as would incline one to think him bit by a mad dog; and that the virulence of the poiſon, inſtead of exhibiting the *hydrophobia*, has taken this unhappy turn, and vents itſelf on *Socinianiſm*.

The examination I have been able to make, into the peculiar tenets of theſe obnoxious people, has inform'd me of their hypotheſis differing from thoſe of other chriſtians, principally, *in their denying the* PRE-EXISTENCE *of Jeſus Chriſt*. They conſider him as truly and properly MAN, tho' conceived in the womb of the virgin, by an immediate divine energy *thus made of a woman*, of a Jewiſh family, and *ſo under the law*. They underſtand his being SENT *from God*, to mean, his divine commiſſion, atteſted

teſted by a preſence of divine wiſdom and power, that was with him. They underſtand, that *the glory he had with the father before the worlds were*, was, in the ſcheme only of the divine purpoſe; and that the exiſtence he had before *Abraham*, only was in the promiſe and prophecy. And that, the *world's being made by him*, intends no more than the diſpoſition of the ages, and his having pre-eminence over all, in conſequence of his obedience unto the death.

They are of opinion, that GODHEAD, does not import, any number of perſons; but only the majeſty and dominion of one. And hence conclude it altogether abſurd, to aſk, "how many perſons are there in the Godhead?" when reaſon and revelation agree, "there can be none other than one God. whoſe eternal power and godhead are made known, in the works of creation and providence. And perhaps, it will be more difficult to affix abſurdity to this hypotheſis, than theſe heated ſpirits imagine. I ſhould rather undertake a defence of their tenets, than either that of the *athanaſian*, or of the *arian*. for it appears, to me, that the notion of *three* diſtinct perſons of equal perfection and glory, is incompatible and inconſiſtent with the unity of God. which yet is the chief corner ſtone of the *Athanaſian*. And as to the other hypotheſis, which reduceth the claims of two of the three perſons, in point of *unoriginated* and *independence*, by giving theſe perfections only to one; at the ſame time, re-

taining to the other two, an eternal generation and proceeding; this ſurely is but a very ſmall and unſatisfactory refinement upon, or an improvement of the tritheſtical ſyſtem. For which reaſon, I have been tempted to conclude, the *Socinians* bid full as fair for a near approach to truth, as either the *trinitarians* or the *arians*. nay, the *unity* ſeems to be much better ſecured with them; becauſe in their interpretation the *myſtery* does totally vaniſh—.

As to moral deductions, or practical uſeful influences from opinion or ſentiment, the *Socinian* may boaſt far more ſuperior advantage: becauſe his apprehenſions of the Deity are more ſimple and clear, and the unity of the object of his adoration much more diſtinct. Beſides, his conceptions of the *merits* and *righteouſneſs*, the obedience and ſufferings of Chriſt, are far leſs perplexed and confuſed, than they can be in the opinion of his proper Deity, or of his half deity and compounded humanity. The very *exaltation* of Jeſus, as a reward of his obedience to the death, the *Socinian* better can conceive of and account for, than if he had ſuppoſed him to have exiſted with God for ever, and that all the worlds were actually made by him: ſince ſuch dignity of nature, does not ſeem at all capable either of the *metamorphoſis* of humanity, or the *Apotheoſis* of divinity. And in the article of his exemplary obedience, there is great confuſion in both the trinitarian and arian hypotheſis: whereas, in the Socinian,

Jeſus

Jeſus Chriſt was capable of temptation, and in all points was formed like unto man; and therefore became a proper and encouraging *example* of piety and virtue.

It would be well if the *protean Laicus*, in ſome lucid interval, would ſhew himſelf capable of reaſoning on the ſubject, ſo as to favour the world with a better ground of diſlike to the *Socinian* tenets, than his own dogmatical declamation. if he does not, there is a quantity of ſhame and confuſion, that is righteouſly his due, and muſt one day pour down on the head of his ſtupidity and inſolence.—I ſhall only add,—

There is no longer any ſecret, in the great averſion that church-men have to *Socinianiſm*. for what HOBBS ſaid of ſome men, *viz.* "they are againſt reaſon, becauſe reaſon is againſt them:" may be ſaid in the caſe before us, "The CRY is loud and paſſionate againſt the *Socinian*, only becauſe his tenets are ſo irreconcileable to myſtery and church-ſyſtem." It is not becauſe of its abſurdity; but becauſe of its unyeilding obſtinacy. It will not mingle with creeds, with litanies, with articles of eſtabliſhed, current orthodoxy: and is an enemy to all ſpiritual power and tyranny. Perſuaded, SIR, you will admit of nothing as religious, but what is rational:

*I am,*

# LETTER the Third,

## ON

# SYSTEMATIC TASTE.

*SIR,*

THERE are not any, I ſhould imagine, who read the diſcourſes of the preſent *Biſhop of London*, that can, with a good grace, deny him the reputation of a fine pen. His language is muſical, his periods flowing, his ſtyle eaſy and engaging: very ſprightly mixtures of wit embelliſh and enliven them. Neither are ſome of them, without merit in their reaſoning, theology, and morality.

True it is, notwithſtanding, that this *Churchman* has not written always, either with perſpicuity or conſiſtency. A remarkable point of doctrine we ſhall pitch upon, in which he has very preſumptuouſly ſhut his eyes, waded out of his depth, and ſadly plunged in obſcurity and contradiction: I mean, *that of the operations and influences of the Spirit*. Vol. IId. Diſc. IId.

The *Biſhop* and *Dr. Sherlock*, ſhall be placed in two diſtinct columns, by as diſtinct citations from the very ſame volume.

Biſhop

*Biſhop of London.*

I.

IF men were able of themſelves to do the whole will of God, and ſo to apply to him as to engage his favour and mercy, and to obtain ſalvation for themſelves at his hands; you will find it very hard to account for the REASONABLENESS of the chriſtian religion, which provides *preternatural aſſiſtances* to enable us to do that which nature can do without them. p. 32.

II. But

*Dr. Sherlock.*

I.

ASCribing *faith* to the operation of the ſpirit, does not make our faith ceaſe to be a reaſonable act of the mind. p. 54.

I

I do not remember that God ever promiſed to force or ſubdue our reaſon to the belief of the goſpel by his ſpirit. p. 57.

II.

But tho' reaſon, upon due application, can diſcern the truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt will: and therefore it is one thing to judge with reaſon, another thing to act with reaſon: and *the grace of obedience* is given us by the ſpirit, that we may not only think, but act like reaſonable creatures. p. 58.

II.

Reaſon is the common rule by which we judge of the actions of all reaſonable beings, and of our own. p. 323.

III. The *Reaſon*

*Biſhop of London.* *Dr. Sherlock.*

*Reaſon will not always ſtrive with man*; but if often ſubdued by corrupt affections, it will at laſt give over the conteſt, and grow hard, ſtupid, and void of feeling. p. 203.

Since God has given us reaſon and underſtanding to moderate and direct our paſſions, it is in vain to plead our paſſions in defence or excuſe of ſenſuality; unleſs at the ſame time we could plead that we were void of reaſon, and had no higher principle than paſſion to influence our actions.—It is the work of reaſon then to preſide over the paſſions. p. 178, 179.

Reaſon is given to man to govern the lower appetites, and to keep

keep them within their proper bounds; in this conſiſts the virtue of man: this is the trial to which he is called; and the prize contended for is no leſs than. immortality p. 190.

III.

The ſpirit dwells with the faithful, to guide and direct them, to ſecond and encourage their good deſires, to help them in overcoming their infirmities, in a word, to labour together with them, in the work of their ſalvation, to make their calling and election ſure. p. 33.

Our Saviour's doctrine, is, that without the aſſiſtance of the ſpirit *we can do nothing*; but with it we may bring forth fruit. To bring

III. An

*Biſhop of London.*

bring forth fruit, — is to be obedient to the laws of God, and to be employed in the works of righteouſneſs: ſo that faith cannot be perfected, or become the governing principle of our lives, *without the aſſiſtance of the ſpirit*, to ſubdue our wills to the law of holineſs. p. 53.

This is an argument for immediate care and induſtry; *God worketh in us when he thinks fit*. p. 74.

For this very reaſon we are careful and diligent, becauſe of our ſelves *we can do nothing*. p. 77.

IV. Faith

*Dr. Sherlock.*

III.

An internal proof of Deity ariſing from Conſcience, and the re-

flection of the mind upon the good or evil we do, amounts to the fulleſt declaration of the power of God, and is the compleateſt promulgation of his law to mankind that can be deſired or expected. with reſpect to the authority of God, and the common laws of morality, ſuch care is taken, that the promulgation is made at every man's door; nay, in his very heart. p. 394.

Morality not being founded primarily upon the authority of revelation, but upon that reaſon which is a *common gift* to mankind, every man muſt anſwer for the uſe of his own reaſon: and where reaſon ſhews him the difference of good and evil, he is without

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out excuſe.——*Reaſon* was given for the very purpoſe, to govern paſſion, and the ſubmitting to paſſion and temptation againſt the light of reaſon is the very depravity and corruption of heart that calls for vengeance. p. 121, 122.

This Senſe of good and evil, which is natural to rational minds and is thus guarded againſt falſe and corrupt interpretations by the power of conſcience, is a great juſtification of the goodneſs and equity of God, in taking care to promulge his laws ſufficiently to all who are bound to obey them, and to make their duty clear and evident to them; without which we ſhould not be able to diſcern him to be the righteous judge of the world, in which

character *we are chiefly concerned to know him.* p. 398.

We may obſerve what care the author of nature has taken, not only to manifeſt himſelf and his laws to us, but likewiſe to ſecure our obedience, and thereby our eternal happineſs and welfare. p. 399.

IV.

Faith is aſcribed to this diſpoſition wrought by the Spirit of God. p. 51.

IV.

The aſſent of the mind to the truth of religion is an act of REASON, and muſt be ſo notwithſtanding the gifts and aſſiſtances of the ſpirit which are previous to the aſſent of the mind; ſo I hope it will not be thought it can be influenced by thoſe

thoſe that are conſequent to it. Faith is not perfected but thro' obedience. The power to obey and to love God, we aſcribe to the ſpirit. Now you cannot obey God 'till you know what is the will of God; therefore you muſt firſt judge of religion, before this gift can operate: and therefore this gift cannot affect your *reaſon* one way or other. After you have proved and conſented to the truth of the Goſpel, it is highly reaſonable you ſhould obey it. p. 57.

If any man is willing to do the will of God, he ſhall know of his doctrine: and if ſo, then to be willing to do the will of God, muſt amount to the ſame thing with being of

of God, and being drawn by God. p. 50.

V.

But tho' reaſon upon due application, can diſcern the truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt will: and therefore it is one thing to judge with reaſon, another to act with reaſon: and the grace of obedience is given us by the ſpirit, that we may not only think, but act like reaſonable creatures. p. 57.

V.

To do the will of God, is to walk in his laws, is to work out our own ſalvation. this to do, under the aſſiſtance which God has given us, *depends upon our ſelves:* we can miſcarry in no point, but in this which is *left to our ſelves.* p. 78.

Natural

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Natural religion is the foundation and ſupport of revelation.—which may caſt new light upon the dictates of reaſon, but can never contradict them. I cannot liſten to revelation but in conſequence of the natural notion I have of God, of his being, his wiſdom, power and goodneſs: deſtroy then the principle of reaſon, and there is no room left for revelation. ſhall I believe it a ſpirit come from God, when I know *that the ſpirit he placed within me*, ſpeaks the contrary? In which caſe, there is only this choice, either to diſown God for my Creator, or to reject the ſpirit which contradicts the law of my creation, and the light of

of reaſon which God has placed in the minds of men. p. 424.

How then does this uncertainty (of a future ſtate) affect the practice of virtue, ſince the certainty requires nothing of us but what our reaſon and preſent intereſt will teach us without it. p. 402.

You ſee then that the common ſenſe and expectation of mankind, with reſpect to the rewards and puniſhments of another life, is ſo far from being the effect of weakneſs and ſuperſtition, that it is the immediate reſult of that reaſon which God has given us: ſo ſtrong a reſult is from our reaſon, that it is not poſſible to juſtify God, and the methods of his pro-

providence by the reaſon he has given us, without maintaining the certainty of a future ſtate, in which ſin ſhall be puniſhed and righteouſneſs rewarded p. 419.

Whether the extracts made, are oppoſed in the beſt manner, I will not ſay: but they are ſo contraſted, as to enable any reader, of common ſenſe and careful attention, to conclude with me,

I. That there is not only obſcurity, but contradiction in the BISHOP's diſcourſes. for he would place the operations and influence of the *ſpirit* in a light which does not conſiſt, at all, with what he has ſaid of the ſufficiency and ſupremacy of reaſon, in all matters of religion and morality.

II. He has endeavoured to convey an idea of the *Spirit's* agency, repugnant to that freedom and fulneſs of the human powers of volition and action, which he himſelf has ſtrongly aſſerted. for he ſais, that of ourſelves *we can do nothing*; and has, abſurdly enough, aſſigned this as a reaſon, why we are careful and dili-

gent, *page* 77. all the while, he has made the whole efficacy of the Spirit's operations and influences to depend *upon our ſelves.* page 78. And not content with this extravagance, in urging this reaſon of care and diligence, becauſe of our inability to do any thing; he moreover points the motive for immediate care and induſtry, from " God's working in us, when he thinks fit." Than which, ſurely nothing can burleſque more the human underſtanding; or more diſhonour the divine volitions.——

III. It ſhould ſeem as if the Biſhop had an infinitely more clear and conſiſtent notion of *natural*, than he has, or ever had, of *revealed* religion. Since he has advanced many excellent obſervations upon the offices and functions of reaſon and conſcience; whilſt he has repreſented revelation as inveloped in involved *myſtery*, and *in ſable darkneſs.*" Unpardonable is his plea if he would have us think, " that there is *religious myſtery* which comes not within the province of reaſon." He abſolutely condemns the plea in the following paragraph——

" We do not teach that nature and reaſon cannot lead to the ſpeculative knowledge of divine truths; for the evidence of all divine truths reſolves itſelf ultimately into either ſenſe or reaſon; which are the common gifts of God to mankind; by the principles of which the truth of all things, depending upon the deductions of ſenſe and reaſon, may be proved and

and examined. From the exerciſe of reaſon we come to know God, and the eſſential difference between good and evil; and by theſe principles are enabled to judge of any doctrine, whether it be agreeable to the pure and holy nature of God; which is the firſt preſumptive argument for the truth of any divine revelation——from reaſon we learn the *unlimited power of God*—and can diſtinguiſh between the works which the power or policy of man can perform, and the works which can flow only from the unbounded power of God." page 46.

Thus has the *Doctor* at one ſingle ſtroke diſarmed the *Biſhop*'s myſtery, of all its enchantment; and diſabled Enthuſiaſm of all its plea of ſuperiour ability, in any of the religious or moral departments of human agency.

And yet, in this cenſure of him, we mean not to ſay, that the *Father of lights* is unable to convey inſtruction, or throw incitements a thouſand ways before the eye of man, in order to excite to the exerciſe of his reaſon, and the improvement of his virtue: Still, the rank ABSURDITY, of man's inability to uſe any divine means, and the neceſſity of impulſive ſupernatural impulſe, both to will and to do, remains unmoveable.——This hypotheſis about the *Spirit*, is not compatible with the promulgation of law, its moral obligation upon us, and our being chiefly concerned to know God, as our judge.—It is quite inconſiſtent with that autho-

rity, made known at the door of every human heart.

I cannot forbear the recital of page 58. "*grace of obedience* given us by the ſpirit, that we may not only think, but act like reaſonable creatures."—methinks, I ſee the laugh burſt through the lawn ſleeve.—The *pen* of ſuch a genius, could not ſurely be grave and ſerious.—*grace of obedience!* a ſpark ſpan new one, now added to the liſt of graces. Created by the right reverend the Biſhop of *London*. This grace of obedience *given by the Spirit*—and not a whit more unintelligible is it, than *the* HOLY GHOST *given by the Biſhop*.—yet, how may we conceive of a ſovereign, giving the grace of obedience to a ſubject; when, at the ſame time, all the *grace* of his ſubject's obedience, is confeſſedly found, in his choſen and cheerful ſubjection? Or, what idea can we form of a prince, granting his ſubject the favour of obeying his own injunctions? Much difficulty is upon the face of this prelatical doctrine. And we muſt ſubmit to the myſtery, from an utter inability of ſaying, what can poſſibly be meant by, "the grace of obedience given us by the ſpirit, that we may not only think but act like reaſonable creatures."—It is well *Biſhops* are not called TEACHERS; a reproachful term applied to Diſſenting miniſters. Happy for the conforming laity, that they are not under ſuch apprehenſions about them. If they were, they would ſoon call in queſtion the reaſonableneſs of the Chriſtian religion, becauſe of

of it's providing *preternatural aſſiſtances* to enable us to do that, which the Biſhop has ſhewn, *nature can do without them.*

His LORDSHIP ſhall not have reaſon to ſuſpect partiality, in theſe animadverſions; for however flagrant is his ſyſtematic taſte, there is not leſs extravagance daily found among men, who diſſent from the Eſtabliſhment, and would be denominated, PROTESTANTS. Many of theſe talk of the *Spirit's aſſiſtances*, and of *free grace*, in the moſt carnal and graceleſs manner. Even with rancorous reſentments towards thoſe, who aſſert the freedom of the human mind, in its moral volitions and determinations! It is, with them, to be *unſound* in the faith, ſhould any plead for the uſe of reaſon, in matters of religion. and none are allowed to be *Goſpel preachers*, but only ſuch, who can ſolemnly veil their bonnets to myſtery; and confeſs themſelves, the moſt impotent and vile of all the workmanſhip of God!

Where ever a people or congregation, are under the miniſtrations of a *Teacher*, who is labouring to recommend the uſe of reaſon in all religious matters, and would perſuade his *charge* to conſider themſelves as moral agents and accountable, if theſe *ſyſtematics* have but opportunity and ſolemn artifice enough, they will quickly ſow *tares* in this promiſing field. they will alarm weak minds, and unſettle them, with notions of *unſoundneſs* in their teachers! And ſuch

ſuch is uſually their ſucceſs, that they ſplit and divide, they break in pieces, *churches*, that were edifying on the principles of everlaſting truth and reaſon.

Not a few of theſe zealots, under pretence of doing honour to the *grace* of God, and of having a zeal for *Goſpel preaching*, have done unſpeakable miſchief to the cauſe of religion; and have ſadly weakened the hands, of the moſt rational and worthy labourers in all Chriſt's vineyard. What the end of theſe things will be, God only knows. but the proſpect is very gloomy! and cannot be otherwiſe, ſo long, as the buſy-body, the wild *Enthuſiaſt* is thruſting his foul fingers into the eye of human underſtanding, and diſabling the efforts of reaſon, in the ſervices of piety and religion.

Whether the BISHOP has not given too much countenance to the ſpread of this dreadful deluſion, in his inconſiſtent account of the SPIRIT, and its influences on the human mind, may poſſibly deſerve his more cloſe and ſerious conſideration. for I would, moſt humbly obſerve, that every method made uſe of, to diſunite and divide, to diſcountenance and weaken the advocates for the rights of private judgment, in all matters of faith and worſhip, will, in its own nature and tendency, infallibly undermine and inevitably ruin the PROTESTANT cauſe, either in this, or in any other country.

Very

Very confident I am, that ſuch abſurdities, ſuch palpable contradictions, as we have found in the *Biſhop's diſcourſes*, could never have dropped from ſuch a pen, were it not that ſyſtem, church-ſyſtem, under the ſmile of civil ſanction, does ſtrangely warp the judgment; and enables a man to blend and compound flagrant *diſparates*, the moſt diſagreeing things in all nature.—When I ſay, *ſyſtem*, I would intend to be underſtood, that of *Church-Theology*, which, has a magic power of infatuation.—Caſt your eye on page 41. where this PRELATE has preferred the authority of the Church, to that of the *Old Teſtament* writings: "Let us therefore work whilſt we have the light, and continually pray, in the *words of our* CHURCH, *O Lord, take not thine holy Spirit from us.*" A petition, originally ſeen in Pſalm li. 11. But becauſe made uſe of in the eſtabliſhed Liturgy, the prayer is ſaid to be in the words of *our Church!* Of much more authority, to be ſure, than if he had ſaid, *in the words of holy Scripture?*——

And becauſe of the church, or clerical dreſs of the ſentiment, 2 Cor. iv. 18. we have a like finiſhing of *Diſcourſe* xvth. page 367. "And as our CHURCH has taught us to pray, *we may ſo paſs through things temporal, that we finally loſe not the things eternal.*" No doubt, the citation from St. PAUL, [*look we not at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen; for the things which are ſeen are temporal,*

*ral, but the things which are not seen are eternal,*] would have a disrelishing flatness in it, when compared with *the teaching of our* CHURCH.—— A novice in Church-Theology, however well acquainted he was with his Bible, would be apt to flinch, and put an impertinent question or two, *viz.* what is meant by *our Church?* and who invested her with authority, to teach men to pray? Does the new testament writings ever once suppose any *church* so qualified? and who can be meant by them who are taught by her, thus to pray? If a dignified *Prelate* should be thought a principal pillar of the Church, then the CHURCH teacheth herself. She exerciseth a spiritual authority over her own self-supremacy. But if a Bishop is a ruler and Governour, a church-legislator; how improperly does he mention the *Church,* as teaching him to pray?— Or, if he would not be understood to include himself, but the unsanctified *Laity* only, and them exclusively of all others, then they should not be conceived of as any part of that Church, who thus teacheth them to pray. the consequence would then be, that the laity are no part of the Church, but taught by her.

Might I form a conjecture, from the acquaintance I have had with the New Testament, the term, CHURCH, when used to signify the people of God, over whom Jesus is head and Lord, will precisely include and comprehend, "every sincere Christian throughout the world, in any and every age, from the commencement

to

to the finiſhing of his reign and dominion." So that it is abſolutely impoſſible, that the *Church* ſhould have ever exerciſed any one ſingle act of legiſlation, or authoritative rule, in any matter or thing, relative either to faith or worſhip. and that of conſequence, the notion or imagination of the CHURCH's *teaching us to pray*, is no better than a devout prelatical dream, that may amuſe, but can never inform or edify the Chriſtian.

It is more than time, that a proteſtant Clergy did lay aſide the arrogant airs of Authority; and never more preſume to mention the word, CHURCH, in excluſive terms. would not they think the Style very ridiculous, if they ſhould read ſuch language in the Sermons of any Diſſenting-Teacher? and yet, why might not *he*, with as much propriety, harrangue, " let us continually pray in the words of OUR CHURCH, or, as ſhe has taught us, *Lord, take not thine holy Spirit from us*,"—Is not the Authority which gives him this inſtruction, in every reſpect as divine and obliging, as when the language and ſtyle is uſed by the mouth, or the pen of a *Dioſceſan-Biſhop* or a *pariſh-prieſt?* If it be; and yet, in the eye of theſe Gentlemen, would be reckoned affectation, and inſufferable vanity: can it be leſs vaninty in themſelves, to uſe theſe groundleſs and unmeaning airs of Authority. For whatever they have, or ever will be able to ſay, *in the church or kingdom of Chriſt, there is no ſuperiority, no pre-eminence; no power of domination,*

*no legiſlation inveſted in any.* Rank, Title, Honours, civil diſtinctions and emoluments have nothing at all to do with the Kingdom of Chriſt, *which is not of this world.*

There is but one more remark I ſhould chooſe to make, and with which I will conclude; whatever theſe *Church-Writers* may deſign, they have done more to ſubſerve the cauſe of infidelity, than ever they will do to weaken and expoſe it. They would firſt ſupport *myſtery*; and to do it, they egregiouſly revile reaſon. So it is they build or conſtruct their theological ſyſtem. But when they have to do with moral obligation, and are diſentangled from their church-tenets, they then give reaſon and conſcience, thoſe natural powers of man, all their ſcope, energy and honours, maintaining with great eclat their ſupremacy.

If this be not the caſe with the *Biſhop* and the Author of the *Centaur not fabulous*, my miſtakes are extravagantly wide of the truth. If I am right, theſe Letters may have their uſe, in ſome degree detecting and preventing the ſpread of deluſion, from ſyſtematic taſte.

I am,

*S I R*,

Your, &c.

The E N D.